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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002240

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STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, April 14, continue to focus on developments in Iraq. Lead stories also highlight the "serious" escalation of U.S. threats against Syria, citing President Bush's accusation of Syrian possession of chemical weapons.

Editorial Commentary

-- "After the fall of the illusion"

Columnist Raja Talab writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (04/14): "With the fall of the biggest statue of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in the center of Baghdad, the ideology, which is closer to illusion more than anything and that prevailed in the Arab world and among the Arab elite for years, collapsed. It is an ideology based on the belief that a dictator can become the liberator and the symbol of freedom and the maker of that freedom. For many decades, Arab totalitarian regimes succeeded in marketing themselves as the refuge for the poor, as the road of salvation for the Arab people from the repercussions of defeat, and as the mouthpieces for the slogans to liberate Palestine. These regimes managed to fool the Arab people for years and drag them from one defeat to another.. Saddam Hussein has become a thing of the past, but he did not go alone. With him went the illusionary ideology of the Arab world that baseless political dreams can be achieved. With him went the ideology that dictators can make freedom and victory and that they have the right, in the name of this freedom, to kill millions."

-- "The Iraq lesson from the Palestinian viewpoint"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the back page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/14): "The Iraq lesson bears so much significance for the Palestinian issue. From the Palestinian viewpoint, the Palestinian reform program has acquired added importance in the post-Saddam era. The people who resisted this program for one reason or another must realize that the fate of the Palestinian issue is now more closely linked to the achievement of this program than at any other time. They must be careful not to give Israel the chance to draw a link between the Palestinian authority and the Iraqi regime, particularly when it succeeded in its 'talibanization' of the Palestinian authority after the events of September 11. Also from a Palestinian viewpoint, it is time to create a unified strategy that would be binding for all the Palestinian national and Islamic parties, that would regain the popular aspect of the Palestinian Intifada and would limit military action to operations against occupation soldiers and settlement areas only. The current stage is crucial, and the experiment of a Palestinian prime minister must succeed, for its success is the only way to stop making the Palestinian the next in line in the series of regime changes after Iraq."

-- "In defense of the Iraqi people"

Columnist Abu Yazan writes on the back page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/14): "The feelings of contempt and anger that overtook the Jordanian people over the past three weeks have changed in the last days of the war, particularly following the fall of Baghdad, into feelings of resentment and denunciation that were not only directed against the late Iraqi regime, but also against the Iraqi people themselves.. We must be very careful about shooting accusations and jumping to conclusions. The Iraqi people have nothing to do with this war. They are its primary victim. They were not consulted before it broke out, just as much as they

were not consulted in any of the major events of Iraqi history. The Iraqi people were denied freedom and security for over thirty years. They have a huge sum of rejection for the dictatorship that made the people suffer the worst. It is therefore natural that some of these people would act without discipline and even without any civility."

-- "Hurry up before it is too late"

Daily columnist Hilmi Al-Asmar writes on the back page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/14): "The usurpation of Iraq has lifted the cover off the Arab political regimes. All are now candidates for the 'liberation' whether they like it or not. It is best for the political elites to start changing their colors and taking cover with their people by 'liberating' their people from oppression and tyranny now when there is no pressure, before this issue becomes a pretext for bringing down the rejectionists and before their files are taken out of the CIA drawers. It is a new age, the age of liberation and democratization by force. So hurry up before it is too late for you."

-- "Help in several ways"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (04/14): "The Bush administration must indeed have a twisted notion of freedom if, as it said yesterday, it really believes that 'looting is a natural expression of freedom'. Many have already argued that the U.S.-British forces stood idle as chaos swept Iraq's major cities as part of a deliberate policy.. Today, we must think practically of what Jordanians can do, in concrete terms, to contain the damage.. There are plenty of good reasons for recrimination: U.S. commanders did put guards at Iraq's oil ministry, but not at hospitals, museums and other crucial buildings. It is unfortunately too late to prevent many of those most precious, unique artifacts from being smashed, disfigured, or stolen. But it is likely that some of the looted items - testimonies to the first great civilization ever - might at some point pass through Jordanian soil.. Relevant authorities, including the military and police at all airports and crossing points, should immediately be mobilized and enlisted in the effort to restore to the Iraqi people what belongs to them.. One of the greatest services that Jordan could do for Iraq would indeed be to contribute to return at least part of the vestiges of its great history and heritage."

GNEHM